Grey Matter: A Graphic Novel

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Chapter 1

Abstract

When the question of personal identity arises, there are many variables that need to be borne in mind. While determinants like culture and religion may be separated, the influence of basic human interaction cannot be removed even from one's most private sense of self. It is through interaction with others and one's relationship to or with them that one's private identity of Self can be understood most accurately and for a

pathologically codependent person, it is their only means of understanding their own identity. They are unable to see themselves outside of their relationship to the proverbial Other. Grey Matter is a graphic novel that sees the dissolution of a woman's mental state after her husband, having felt smothered and held back for ages, decides to leave. She is, as per the aforementioned equation, the codependent Self and her husband is the Other. Like the 'lacking self' Sartre talks about, Fera finds her identity coming apart at the seams when her constantly giving Other removes himself from the picture and she struggles to hold herself up along with the entirety of her notion of reality whereby her neurosis manifests in a Kafkaesque manner pitching her against herself.

As Fera struggles to understand what drove Abad away, she questions herself as a mother, a wife, and a woman. She spends a week within the confines of her now empty house and navigates through the phases of her life in retrospect whereby the reader begins to see how she has been moulded over the years into the proverbial codependent Self who has unwittingly bent her husband out of form leaving him feeling estranged; the Other. The name itself alludes to the nuances of the couple's marriage. When in conflict, one often tries to

place the Other's behaviour in black or white; they are either fair or unfair, right or wrong, loving or indifferent. The reality of the situation is often more complex than this. Like there is no clear good or bad, there is often no fully right or wrong in conflict. This sets the background for the falling apart of Fera and Abad's relationship where neither are in the right or wrong fully and this is perhaps what makes the process of detaching all the more difficult for both. Furthermore, in Fera's mental degeneration, the underlying narrative emerges as that of the amorphous manifestation of Fear. The emergence and eventual departure of the monstrous being that grows out of a spot on Fera's forehead and is only 'real' when she is in fact completely on her own is in fact the metaphorical actualisation of the Self vs Self phenomenon where Fera is brought face to face with her reality which is no longer in her control.

<u>Passion</u>

Having chosen to take an introspective approach to my thesis, the inspiration for Grey Matter is largely rooted in my personal struggle with separation anxiety and borderline codependent personality disorder. A lot of elements in the graphic novel ranging from some specific scenes (visually) to the overarching narrative of a broken home are derived from my personal experience as a child of separation and eventually divorce. I can go as far as to say that Fera is largely the sum of my experience as an active participant (as the very vocal child) and a passive observer of the dissolution of marriage, its aftermath, and the neurosis driven by the sense of not being in control that ensues. Other than the basic framework upon which Fera's character has been constructed, there are various characters, scenes, and motifs in the graphic novel that have been taken from my own life. Upon completion, Grey Matter serves as something of a roadmap of evolution that I myself travelled by and still somehow find myself forever meandering through; a very private memoir.

<u>Project Scope</u>

The aim from the conception of the project has been to be able to tell a story and it is therefore that creating a graphic novel was a decision I was able to take fairly early in the process. The nuance of language and gestures whereby oftentimes one is present in the absence of the Other is something that could best be explored in this format. Even though it is not vastly talked about or recognised for the monster it is, Codependency is nothing short of terrifying and often completely paralysing as the subject is not able to remain in touch with rationale but rather driven by heightened volatile emotions. It is as common as it is uncovered and is the cause of the falling apart of countless relationships whether they be romantic, friendly, or even those between parents and children. My aim with Grey Matter has been to explore one out of a million stories of how codependency takes away ones identity, ones ability to hold themselves up, and what it may take to just be after the fact of it. Although to assume that this story finds a happy resolution would be untrue as this is a many-faced monster with countless lives, I'd like to believe there is immense power in man to push and keep on pushing toward reason.

<u>Design Statement</u>

The choice to keep the novel hand-drawn in pencil instead of ink with all the text in my own handwriting was in order to add another layer of meaning which is simultaneously complex as well as fairly simplistic. It lends it the raw sentimentality that one would be able to liken to the process of journalling. This not only underlines the fact that this is a many-layered fragile narrative but also the fact that the story of Fera's struggle is a fictionalised re-telling of something deeply personal to me. It allows me the space to bring more of my own story into the process making the process very cathartic. The choice to keep the novel devoid of colour except the addition of red at some points and in select motifs (in varying intensities and saturations) further elucidates the monotony while making some things stand out. As the topic at hand is very nuanced and delicate, it is possible for the reader to get lost in the cosmetic embellishments and it is for this reason that the choice to keep the novel devoid of colour save the pop of red at various points serves to bring only those elements to light which, at the given point where they appear, serve to elucidate the underlying sentiment. Furthermore, a lot of elements that appear in red are artefacts taken from my own

life and are placed there to serve as a keepsake from my memory. The red socks, for example, are one of the things I remember most distinctly from one of the defining moments of my adolescent life.

Target Audience

The target audience can be seen as undefined for the most part-except for general classification of the graphic novel as suited for mature audiences because of the complexity of the content and some imagery that could be distressing to some people. The aim has, however, been to add to the language of the graphic novel especially that within Pakistan. As Grey Matter is a story of a Pakistani family against the backdrop of Pakistan a layer of relatability is added for the Pakistani reader. To simplify it further, if I may, I would go as far as to say that this graphic novel is for the adolescent growing up feeling out of place because they never really know how to feel at home lest in the intimate presence of another. It is for the adult who struggles to maintain healthy friendships, marriages, and family lives because their codependent nature compels them to always feel in control, in the loop, and

validated. It is for everyone who has ever felt they are nobody

if not for the people they surround themselves with.

Chapter 2

<u>Research Questions</u>

•   What is one's identity in terms of the space and time one occupies in the life of others?

•   How does one's identity as a codependent personality alter/mould that of the Other?

•   How can one explore the working of an inherently codependent person's mind through introspective narrative building and storytelling?

•   How does the fundamental break between the I-Thou equation occur when one or both parties are codependent?

•   What is one's personal identity when not influenced by the space and time others occupy in their life? Is there such a thing?

<u>Theoretical Framework/Concepts</u>

The primary philosophical theory forming the groundwork for Grey Matter is existentialism. Existentialism is rooted in the affirmation as well as rebellion where every transition requires killing the old self and projecting oneself into the future (Robert Kegan). The focus of existentialists, whether it

be Sartre, Kierkegaard, or Heidegger, remains on the free will of man to determine the way Human Being and Ontological Being interact.

Moreover, existential dread and its manifestation in absurd and surreal ways is another key idea. Existential dread, unlike fear, is of Nothing and therefore of everything. It has no specific object but is still perpetual. Sartre wrote that in existential dread one is 'condemned to be free' whereby man is thrown into the world to sustain himself till the Nothing he comes from leads back into the Nothing that lies ahead. As the saying goes, "nacht selbst nichtet" (Nothing nihilates Nothing).

Fig 1.0

Fera comes from a place of emotional vulnerability where she is seen to always rely on someone or the other in her earlier years whether it be her friends Kainaat, Zain, or Abad. After her husband leaves her, Fera is faced with the hopelessness of her lack of purpose and begins to disintegrate as she approaches her Nothing, once again. The zit-like growth on Fera's forehead eventually grown into a being bigger than her which begins to overpower her in a reversal of power. In the way it is seen to grow over the time as she is seen engulfed in

Fig 1.1

Fig 1.2

distress, one can see the existential dread grow as well. (Fig 1.0)

Surrealism is employed mainly in two ways (Fig. 1.1 & 1.2); in the synapse-like connections that appear each time Fera feels she is making a connection with Abad and perhaps getting him on the same wavelength (e.g. when she is having a conversation with him at the table the morning after he has left the house and she is trying to make him see sense and get over what she assumes is a momentary lapse in judgement) and in the materialisation of Fera's neuroses as a veinous fluid creature that grows from a zit on her forehead that only seems to be there when she is alone to a full-fledged monster of sorts that is able to function independent of her body. It is important to note, however, that the being is, despite how real it becomes, a figment of Fera's deranged imagination; her demon.

Fig 1.3

During the initial stages of the conception of Grey Matter, there was a lot to be thought about in terms of the narrative style and voice. One of the major influences on the way the story is written comes from the works of Virginia Woolf and perhaps even Harold Pinter. Woolf's use of the stream of

consciousness has influenced the way in which I have grown

as a writer and it was, therefore, that I wanted to keep the

narrative for Grey Matter as raw and real as possible (Fig.

1.3). This means there are often changes in the flow of

conversation that may not seem relevant with one another but

still flow as natural conversation would. The depiction of the

mundane without any explicit resolution or end point is an

important element taken from the works of Pinter. An

important borrowed concept is that of the 'Pinter Silence';

"There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The

other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed.

This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it."

He adds,

"I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in

what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual

evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to

ourselves."

(In a speech called Writing for the Theatre, 1962)

It is for this reason that a lot of times conversation is substituted for the possibility of conversation and room is created for wordless expression.

A. Literature Review

Codependency can be described as a pattern of unhealthy behaviours that emotionally debilitate a person and could leave them physically ill. It is defined as 'compulsive behaviours and reliance on others in order to establish safety, self worth, and identity.' (Treadway, 1990) A codependent person, therefore, is one who is over-involved, reliant on other people's validation (especially that of a romantic or sexual partner), not focused on the development of the self, and has a poor sense of personal boundaries. (Walter, 1990) While a codependent person may appear to be overbearing, always trying to be in control of how situations and conversations play out but internally this person constantly feels a sense of guilt, resentment, and an overwhelming amount of responsibility which they feel reluctant to delegate. They have a strongly self-defeatist attitude and do not allow themselves to initiate loving relationships and often feel a strong sense of abandonment anxiety when the few people they do 'cling' to

seem to want boundaries or breathing space. (Yates &

McDaniel)

Historically, codependency was understood to be the

'enabling behaviour of the partner of an alcoholic'. According

to this, the person displaying codependent behaviour is

assumed to be suffering from an addiction whether it be of

drugs, alcohol, or the support of another person. In this way,

codependency has assumed a seductive/romantic notion over

the years which is what makes it all the more dangerous.

(Brown, 1990) Codependency is also often confused with

interdependency. The latter implies a more positive co-sharing

while the former is no less than a psychological phenomenon

that has debilitating effects on the parties involved. It is

believed that a codependent person is 'process-addicted' and

gets high off of the process and withdrawals incurred by

separation. Furthermore, one of the reasons why

codependency is so widely misunderstood is because of the

fact that it has been deemed a 'woman's disease' as its

characteristics can be seen as the 'reflections of the prescribed

cultural roles of women' where their caretaking qualities are

seen as a pathology. As per Haaken, 1990, codependency

describes 'the effects of oppression' of 'an identity based on

powerlessness and taking responsibility for others'. 'Codependency needs to be redefined as over-responsibility' where the goal is to be able to 'experience intimacy but also stand alone'. (Anderson)

A key element of codependency that needs to be understood, especially in reference to Fera's character in Grey Matter, is the separation anxiety that overwhelms the subject and often makes her act out. Separation anxiety largely alludes to a resistance to change, fear of the unknown, and suspicion of others' intentions and actions. (Wesley) It is all of this that drives Fera to have responses that are contradictory in themselves when trying to communicate with her husband. She seems to act almost in a bipolar manner where one minute she is trying to draw him in by displaying great kindness while trying to establish an emotional connection and being completely withdrawn and standoffish in the next moment. On multiple occasions, Fera forcefully shuts herself off from the situation (e.g. when Abad is packing his bags at the end of chapter one, Fera looks out the window and avoids looking in his direction as he leaves) because she is reluctant to acknowledge that things are changing, she has no control over the direction they are taking, and that avoiding the physical
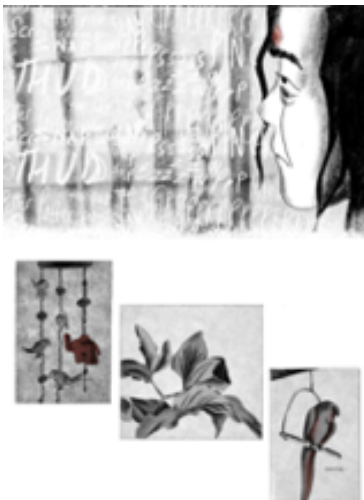

Fig 1.4

experience of it cannot prevent her from having to accept the fact of it. (Fig. 1.4)

Fera's inability to deal with this change in her life is such that it begins to manifest itself in the form of a monstrous being. She is unable to accept the finitude of her relationship and thus begins her neuroses which, according to Rudolph Allers, originates from a metaphysical crisis; obsession with Self and inability to accept one's limitations. As per Balthasar, it is the excess of thought beyond the sensation of it that contains the beginning of anxiety. This results in Fera's mental breakdown whereby she finds herself throwing things around the kitchen and crouched in a corner biting into raw nuggets while she looks back at a fond memory of her husband referring to their newborn son's hand as a little nugget. (Fig. 1.5 -1.8)

Furthermore, the identity crisis that lies at the basis of codependency can best be understood as existential dread which is not 'muddled emotionalism' but rather a perpetual state of being that has no object as fear does. Dread is a constant awareness of an impending change and an inability to accept, alter, or escape. In Sartre's words, 'man is condemned to be free' and it is this freedom to exist and face the

Fig 1.5

Fig 1.6

Fig 1.7

Fig 1.8

Figure 1.9

Figure 2.0

consequences of one's actions that incurs existential dread such as that which possesses Fera when faced with a situation in her life that is out of her control and ability to rationalise. As Clarice Lispector writes in Hour of The Star, "Am I a monster or is this what it means to be a person?", at various points as Fera evades her reality and questions Abad about his reasons for leaving, she is forced to encounter that which is undesirable and perhaps not fully human within her.

In her book Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice, Susan S. Lansier states: 'the death of individualism is emphatically not the loss of voice, least of all the loss of generalising voice' and talks about Virginia Woolf's use of multiple unidentified voices. It is from here that the idea of giving Fera a manifestation outside of her own body emerged. The zit that forms on her forehead and eventually grows into a being that exists and moves separately and seems to be controlling Fera is another voice of hers that she is unable to identify and own. (Fig 1.9 and 2.0) Furthermore, in the paper The Possibility of Conversation (Gurevitch, 1995), it is said that when one makes conversation they experience it as two entities. An incision takes place between the mouth that speaks the words and the ears that

hear it. In this sense, if I say a particular word I experience it as a speaker as well as a listener, both of whom are separate entities in and of themselves. This idea of the Self being divided within itself and becoming estranged to one's own voice further strengthened the decision to grow the zit into a face of Fera's that she is unable to recognise.

Moreover, it is said:

"We are made of sentences, our innermost self consisting of unvoiced verbal expression. Novelists and cartoonists can get inside the mind of their figures without causing us surprise because that's what our mind is-a thing designed for others to get inside of, a box of sentences" (Goffman).It is for this reason that there are a lot of scenes in Grey Matter that, despite their intensity, are devoid of text or have minimal conversation. The blank spaces created in these scenes is to be seen not as lacking power but as open-ended. Their blankness or incompleteness serves as a possibility of expression and an excess of possibility rather than a lack of impact. (Rolfe, 1997)

Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2

When it comes to the way Fera's character has been fleshed out to be a woman with a life that is seemingly full (she is a mother, a wife, a physically well functioning adult), but remains incomplete as the lacking self in the I-Thou equation that Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir talk about whereby the self needs the gaze of the other to reveal dimensions of itself. After Abad leaves her, Fera questions herself as a wife, mother, and woman. She wonders if it is her voice or the way she looks that has driven Abad away. Even in the scenes featuring Fera's relationships with her teenage friends Zain and Kainaat, Fera is seen leaning on them for moments of fulfilment (Fig 2.1 and 2.2). In this one is able to see that Fera sees herself only as the sum of the roles she has played in the lives of others. The Aristotelean saying goes, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" but as an intrinsically codependent person, Fera lacks a holistic cohesive identity of her own if not that which comprises of her role in the lives of her husband and children. Another indicator of her codependent nature is the fact that it is inferred that Fera's entire life revolved around Abad and the children. She is not in touch with any of her friends and does not seem to have anyone else as even after days of her being locked up in the house, Abad is the only one who comes to check on her. Their

house, moreover, becomes a metaphor for Fera's mind. Closed until the very end where Fera seems to be trapped inside even though it is of her own will, Fera leaving the apartment to go onto the roof in the end serves as sign of her finally being able to move outside of the same box; Square One. (McMullin, 2011) The closing scene sees Fera standing on the balcony humming a line from a song suggesting that she is accepting the vastness of her lack of control. As Clarice Lispector writes, "it is frightening to step out of oneself", and Fera seems to escape her own self when she leaves the apartment and comes out onto the roof; a motif that has symbolised possibility and acceptance at various points in the story. (Fig 2.3)

Figure 2.3

Another work that has an incredibly strong impact on the way Grey Matter comes together in terms of its narrative is The Days of Abandonment by Elena Ferrante whereby Ferrante tells the story of a woman who has been left by her husband for a much younger woman.

Ferrante writes,

"What a complex foamy mixture a couple is. Even if the relationship shatters and ends, it continues to act in secret pathways, it doesn't die, it doesn't want to die."

Figure 2.4

It is in similar fashion that after leaving the house and the various phone conversations between him and Fera that are steeped in resentment and reek of irreconcilability, Abad comes back to check on her when she has been out of touch. Falling back into a familiar pattern, he bathes and feeds her and stays upon her insistence. There is a bond between the two that cannot be broken, for better or worse, regardless of their romantic inclination or aversion to one another or Abad's decision to end their marriage. Something that comes as easy as muscle memory. (Fig 2.4)

Moreover, Ferrante adds at another point,

"I had taken away my own time and added it to his to make him more powerful. I had put aside my own aspirations to go along with his. At every crisis of despair I had set aside my own crises to comfort him. I had disappeared into his minutes, into his hours, so that he could concentrate. I had taken care of the house, I had taken care of the meals, I had taken care of

the children, I had taken care of all the boring details of everyday life, while he stubbornly climbed the ladder up from our unprivileged beginnings."

Similar to the way Ferrante's protagonist feels wronged because of how her husband saw her as a disposable part of his world whereas she made him her entire world, Fera feels her life has come to a halt and she is unable to grasp her reality when faced with a similar realisation. This is not to say, however, that in fact that is how it was and that Abad treated her as dispensable or did not put in constant effort but that the way she sees it she did all the giving in their relationship. This again is one of the cogs in the vicious cycle that their marriage has become where Abad has been drained of all he had to give of himself to make Fera feel whole and his withdrawal has left Fera feeling betrayed and abandoned.

B. Visual References

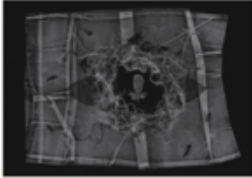• Exploration of Identity via forming an alter ego

Vervina Henry

Vervina is part-Japanese on her Father's side and refers to this aspect of her background as her "hidden identity". Through her work, Vervina has explored what her personality represents; its history and cultural heritage using herself as the subject of her enquiry.

"I am gaining a better understanding about my cultural background through Nági, an alter ego I have constructed that plays a prominent role in my work; as the subject she represents my feelings, emotions, and thoughts on my culture."

• Exploration of Identity through the exploration of the subconscious mi

Susan Aldworth

The Dark Self

The Dark Self is a major new exhibition by Susan Aldworth exploring the experience of sleep. A highly original and experimental artist known for her unorthodox printmaking techniques and philosophical investigations into the human brain and identity, in this exhibition Aldworth challenges us to reflect upon our nightly transitions from consciousness to oblivion.

- Exploration of Identity as a layered entity employing magic realism

Erik Thor Sandberg

"Dead things, naked things, vintage things, antique things, disturbingly cute things, acutely disturbing things."

- Exploration of Identity through memory

Shona Illingworth

"In collaboration with neuropsychologists Martin A. Conway and Catherine Loveday, Shona Illingworth has worked with and filmed Claire, who, following a trauma to her brain can no longer remember most of her past, create new memories or recognise anyone – not even herself. However the new sensory operated camera technology worn around her neck can help reactivate access to some of her 'forgotten' memories, in rare bursts of intense recollection.

The sudden end to Claire's access to her memories echoes the evacuation of the inhabitants of the remote Scottish archipelago of St. Kilda on 29 August 1930, ending over 2,000 years of continuous habitation. Both mark an abrupt and irreversible lesion in a cultural landscape."

- Exploration of Identity through illustration

- Exploration of existential dread in comics

<u>Research Questions Explained</u>

Since the exploration of pathological codependency has informed most of my research, the above mentioned questions have all been treated as part of one greater concern. One's identity is one's sense of self and for a codependent person, their sense of self is not only validated but also defined by other people's views of them and participation in their lives. In this regard it can be said that the space and time the Other occupies in the life of the codependent Self is directly proportional to their self-worth, and their sense of security and stability.

In a codependent relationship the lacking Self is seen as the party sucking the Other dry of their energy, attention, affection, and approval to the point where the Other begins to lose parts of itself. The debilitating effect is two-way in this equation as parts of both parties' 'individual being' are chipped away. The Other loses itself in the perpetual act of giving and Self in a never-ending struggle to feel self-assuredly whole. That which becomes their undoing is also, ironically, what binds them together and it is in this vicious

cycle of dread that both parties are suspended; the Existential Void.

In theory it is possible to easily recognise the pattern and be able to establish cause and effect. In practicality, however, the codependent I-Thou equation falls in the grey area. To be able to understand how this equation works in the real world it is important to take note not only of behavioural patterns but also the past life that the subject comes from. Most codependent behaviour is said to be a result of childhood trauma whereby the child repeatedly felt a sense of abandonment or separation anxiety from one or both parents. The inner child remains in trauma even as the subject ages and matures and begins to develop relationships outside of their immediate family and manifests itself in codependent behaviours such as constantly seeking their partners validation and affection, not being able to establish healthy boundaries, not understanding the concept of space between partners, always feeling the need to be in control, always feeling the need to fix problems themselves because they do not understand how to delegate responsibility, etc.

The mind of the codependent self is always insecure whether it be in their relationships, their appearance, their abilities, or their fate. Separation from the Other cannot only keep them on edge but at times make them feel like they have lost their sense of purpose and cannot carry on with their lives as a 'normal' person would. A lot of my understanding of the concept not only comes from my research on it but my introspection of my own life as I try to identify unhealthy patterns of behaviour and pathological codependency resultant from my own childhood trauma.

To the codependent self, their sense of self outside of the influence of or interaction with the other is vague to the point where they might believe it does not exist to begin with. As Fera manoeuvres through the days and states of being from disbelief to self-destructive complacence to finally what seems like a semblance of hope and resolution in the end, one may see her beginning to understand what she is when she is not Abad's wife, the mother of Abad's children, Abad's roommate, etc. She begins to look back at who she was in her adolescent years. Her conversation with her friend Zain is especially telling of the difference in who she used to be and how centred around Abad she has now become. Perhaps it is

reflecting on her own ability in the past to know something

was wrong and out of her control and still be able to laugh

about it that helps her to escape from the confines of her home

which is, as mentioned before, symbolic of her constricted

state of mind.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Most of the data collected for the culmination of Grey Matter
was qualitative as it was centred around the study of identity
and people's subjective struggles with identity crises. My
primary research was done through journalling and
photography. The secondary research included in-depth study
of various journals, papers, and fictitious literature addressing
the topic. Apart from literary research, the initial research
stage also consisted of visual research looking at projects
exploring the idea of the volatility of identity. Once I began
working on the graphic novel, most of the research being done
along-side the making process was visual research in terms of
anatomical references and references for parts of the house
and a look back into some of my personal journals.

Data Sources

Since Grey Matter does not fall directly under one of the
umbrellas of design), the research methodology has also been

mostly self-generated, introspective, and heavily based upon my own ability to identify and funnel my own life experiences. Most of the inspiration, some of the recurring motifs are taken from my recollection of my own life. Moreover, another significant portion of my primary research was in the form of site and figure photography. As I was able to decide my direction in terms of execution quite early in the process, the storyboarding and photo referencing for the graphic novel was something I spent a fair amount of time on. It was around a week long process writing the script for the novel and it was at the beginning of the writing process that I decided where exactly I wanted to situate my characters.

My reference for their home is an apartment in Askari XI owned by one of my friends' parents. It is a small two bedroom apartment set up in a way that makes it feel as if it is separate from the rest of the world. The meticulous way in which it is decorated and set up instantly clicked with the image I was trying to build of Fera's in my head. As a metaphor for the way Fera has made her husband and her life as a wife and mother her entire universe, the apartment with attention to detail from the candle stands to the ladybird wrap-arounds for the indoor bamboo plant has always been a

perfect setting. Once done with the script, I documented every

part of the apartment and collected over 1000 images from

different angles and tried to place Fera in every nook and

cranny of the house and see how she evolved in my head.

Preceding the entire process of laying down the framework for

Grey Matter was the initial research stage in which most of

the data collected was through secondary sources from

research papers, journals, novels, and articles. At that time the

research was fanning out in various directions as I looked at

the general idea of private identity as defined by factors other

than culture, race, or religion. Major areas of study in this

stage was on existential thought, surrealism, slice of life

literature. Two novels that heavily influenced me during this

phase were Hour of The Star by Clarice Lispector and Days of

Abandonment by Elena Ferrante. The visual references were

sourced from art journals, online exhibitions, etc.

**Chapter 4 + 5**

Medium of Presentation

Grey Matter is a hand-drawn illustrative graphic novel which with all the text in my everyday handwriting that was initially to be submitted as a printed, coptic bound book measuring 17cmx35cm. The touch and feel of the paper on which it would be printed along with the hand-stitched binding would add a raw and personal element. In light of the Covid-19 situation whereby the project has been transferred onto a digital platform, the novel will now be submitted as an e-book including everything the print version would have included. As an add-on, the branding and a few mockups of what it could have looked like had it been executed in print will be included.

To work in print was a conscious decision taken in order to keep the end result as true, close, and personal as possible. As mentioned before, the fact that the content is all hand-drawn in pencil (instead of being inked) and the text is in my own handwriting makes the entire process of creating the novel cathartic, the likes of writing a journal perhaps, as it has been,

inherently a form of introspective channelling for me. The paper medium would have served to enhance the personal element while making it relatable as the reader would be able to feel the texture of the paper, the raw binding, and thus feel more connected to the story.

Execution

Prior to the conception of Grey Matter, while my area of concern was still Identity the exploration didn't start off as something narrative led. I started off with abstract experimentation of the concept of the void and man's aimless existence inside of it with the aim of identifying and being able to discern between the Nothing man emerges from and the Nothing one returns to.
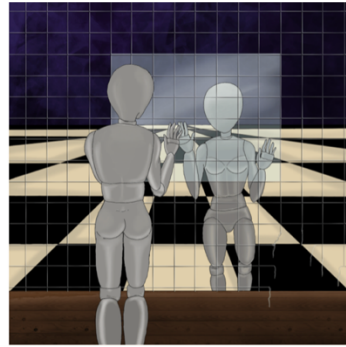

Shot In The Dark

Who Are You To Me

میں کون ہوں
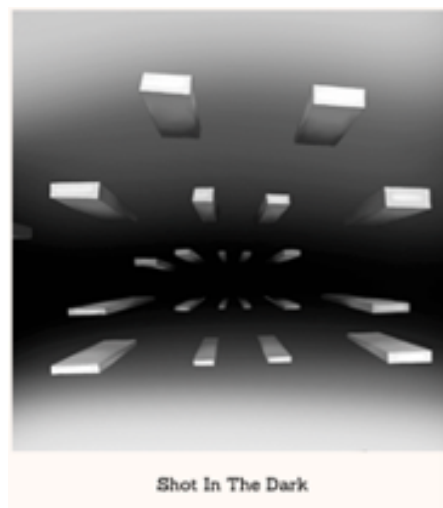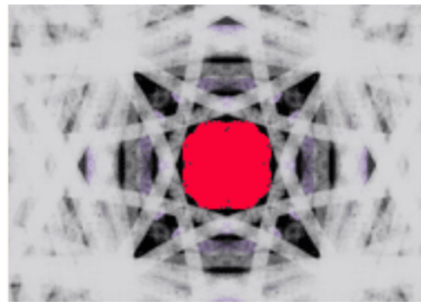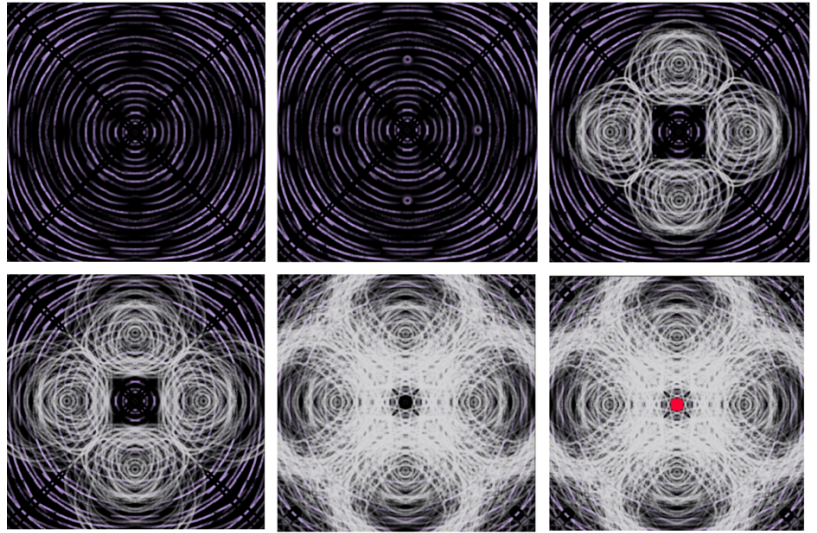
Beyond this point I tried illustrating the phenomenon of the

codependent lacking self yearning for completion by the other

by incorporation text as well as characters.

Me Through You

I am the space I occupy

I am a vacancy

Beyond this point I began to explore other mediums and shifted towards a more narrative-led process whereby I constructed wire structures for the lacking self and other and tried to visualise their equation in a physical medium.

In the following model I kept in mind the concept of magnetic fields and the idea that two magnets can only attach with one another when their poles and placed opposite to one another. I visualised the Self and Other as polar opposite forces which work as one mechanism only because of the ways in which they differ.
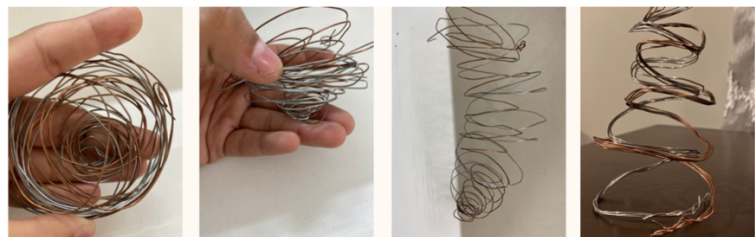
I created a narrative of the Self and Other as origination on different axes and coming close to one another on their orbits but never truly being still and together in one place and that being, both, their undoing as well as the driving force for their lives. Continuing the wire experimentation and through photo-manipulation, I tried to visualise the story.
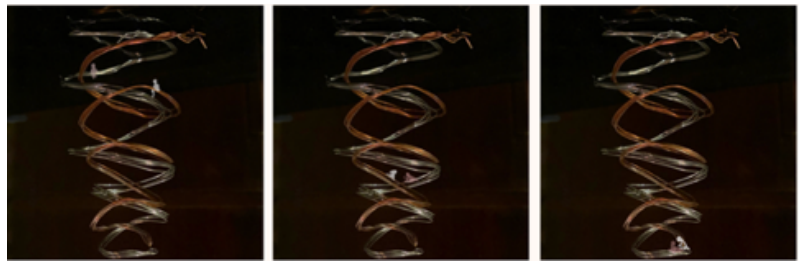
In this model, the Self and Other try at various points to eradicate the space between them and unite but are unable to and only stop and meet at the point where both have been bent out of shape and changed completely (where one has been growing hollow at the core and the other has been scratching at their skin to peel it off and fill the chasm in the former).

Furthermore, I visualised their point of unison as the place where the ground splits and their fall, inevitably, resumes. For this I decided to experiment with traditional painting on canvas.

At this point it had become clear that a narrative-led story-telling process felt more natural to me and was what I wanted to explore more. I began to sketch out scenes while simultaneously looking up the structure of comics and graphic novels should that be the direction I choose to move in. From this point onward, Grey Matter began to materialise step by little step.

Pre-Production

Once the decision to create a graphic novel was made, the production of it required for me to look into the ways in which it was possible to bring the entire thing to life. There were various processes and people that needed to be involved as the entire thing had to go through a process of been made in pencil then being inked then for the text to be added. I looked into various artists' work such as that of Hamza Bajwa and Harris Ejaz. It was only once I began to storyboard and create the layout in pencil that I realised the entire inking process was a step I did not want to include in my process at all as the

roughness of the pencil work added an entire layer of meaning to the story.

I also had to spend time looking into the type of printing and binding I wanted fairly early in the process as that had the potential to alter some of the design elements as well. This was something that could not be left till the end as it would potentially inform the way in which the pages would be designed and whether they were to be seen in terms of individual leaves or spreads. Illustration styles, whether to choose a metaphoric and symbolic approach instead of a literal one, what faces to give each character and make them really 'look the part' was also something that took a few weeks to do before the actual production of the novel began.

Chapter 6

<u>Conclusion</u>

When I decided to put together a graphic novel, I was met

with a lot of skepticism from peers and advisors as they felt I

was underestimating the gargantuan task at hand especially

given the repetitive process whereby I would first have to

storyboard, then make everything in pencil, then move on to

the inking, and finally add in the text. It was, however,

something that I had mentally resolved to accomplish

regardless of the hours of work or the tedious process that was

to follow and as fate would have it, once I began working on

it, a lot of parts of the process began to resolve themselves.

For example the fact that the entire inking stage was

eliminated once I decided I preferred the penciled look better.

Not only did the process of bringing Grey Matter to life give

me immense insight into the entire process of making graphic

novels but also helped me improve my skill as an illustrator.

By and large, I have not yet restricted myself to one style of

illustration and usually go for whatever feels most natural at

the given time but the process of working in a cohesive style

for an extended period of time helped me polish my skill and

get a better understanding of human anatomy, drawing in

perspective, etc. As a person who has been writing for years. Without a single piece that reached completion, Grey Matter served as a first time for that as well and paved the way for what I'd like to believe will be a long journey ahead experimenting with the graphic novel medium.

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